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BEIRUT PASS TO A/S WELCH, NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE AND IPA, NSC
FOR ABRAMS/WATERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/16/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#)
SUBJECT: GAZA: AT LEAST 16 MORE DEAD AS HAMAS STRIKES AT
FATAH SECURITY COMMANDERS, KEY FACILITIES

REF: A. JERUSALEM 891
[1](#)B. JERUSALEM 882

CLASSIFIED BY: CONSUL GENERAL JAKE WALLS, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY. IN A SIGNIFICANT ESCALATION OF FIGHTING BETWEEN HAMAS- AND FATAH-ALIGNED FORCES, 43 PALESTINIANS HAVE BEEN KILLED AND OVER 110 INJURED SINCE MAY 12. HAMAS ATTACKS HAVE CONCENTRATED ON KEY LEADERSHIP/FACILITY TARGETS, WITH MILITARY-WING GUNMEN KILLING 6 FATAH BODYGUARDS AT INTERNAL SECURITY CHIEF RASHID ABU SHBAKS HOUSE AND ASSAULTING MAJOR PASF BASES IN GAZA CITY. DESPITE A NEW, EGYPTIAN-BROKERED CEASEFIRE AND PHONE CALLS BETWEEN HAMAS LEADER KHALID MISHA'AL AND PRESIDENT MAHMUD ABBAS (ABU MAZEN), INTENSE FIREFIGHTS CONTINUE AS OF 1530 LOCAL ON MAY 16 IN GAZA CITY AND NORTHERN GAZA. HAMAS CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR 36 QASSAM ROCKET LAUNCHES AGAINST ISRAEL ON MAY 15-16, WITH 17 ROCKETS STRIKING SDEROT. THE IDF KILLED A NATIONAL SECURITY FORCES (NSF) SOLDIER MAY 15 NEAR KARNI/AL-MINTAR, AND THE IAF KILLED 4 "EXECUTIVE FORCE" MEMBERS IN A RAFAH AIRSTRIKE. ACCORDING TO PUBLIC COMMENTS BY PLO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE SECRETARY-GENERAL YASSER ABD RABBO, PRESIDENT ABBAS WILL

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TRAVEL TO GAZA, AND SEVERAL FATAH LEADERS WANT HIM TO DECLARE A STATE OF EMERGENCY. END SUMMARY.

HAMAS ATTACKS ABU SHBAK'S HOUSE

[1](#)2. (SBU) HAMAS MILITARY-WING GUNMEN ATTACKED INTERNAL SECURITY CHIEF RASHID ABU SHBAKS GAZA CITY HOME EARLY MAY 16 (ABU SHBAK WAS NOT PRESENT). THEY KILLED 6 BODYGUARDS AND HEAVILY DAMAGED THE HOUSE, ACCORDING TO PALESTINIAN SECURITY SOURCES. (COMMENT: HAMAS LIKELY TARGETED ABU SHBAK AS THE PRIMARY LEADER OF PASF/FATAH OPERATIONS IN GAZA PRESENTLY. END COMMENT). HAMAS GUNMEN ALSO ATTACKED THE HOMES OF GAZA FATAH FIELD COMMITTEE MEMBER MAHER MIQDAD AND FATAH LEADER (AND FORMER PSO COLONEL) SAMIR MASHARAWI WITH MORTARS AND MACHINE GUN FIRE ON MAY 16. THEY KILLED A FORCE 17 GUARD IN ATTACK ON MASHARAWI'S HOUSE.

7 KILLED IN AFTERMATH OF
PSO BASE STRIKE

[1](#)3. (SBU) GAZA PSO SOURCES REPORT THAT 5 HAMAS PRISONERS AND 2 PSO GUARDS WERE KILLED AT 1300 ON MAY 16 WHEN HAMAS FIGHTERS HIT THE VEHICLE CARRYING THEM WITH AN RPG. HAMAS FIGHTERS HAD ATTACKED THE GAZA CITY BURJ AL-SALAH TOWER WITH EXPLOSIVES AND MACHINE GUN FIRE, BUT WERE REPELLED. THE BUILDING IS HOME TO GAZA PSO CHIEF COL. YUSIF ISSA AND FATAH PLC MEMBER/HEAD OF GAZA'S FATAH FIELD COMMITTEE MAJID ABU

SHAMMALA. PSO GUARDS CAPTURED 5 HAMAS GUNMEN AND WERE TRANSPORTING THEM TO THE PSO HQ WHEN THEIR VEHICLE WAS HIT AND DESTROYED.

NSF, INTELLIGENCE, PSO BASES TARGETED

14. (C) PASF CONTACTS REPORT AT LEAST TWO DEATHS AND SEVERAL INJURIES FROM HAMAS ATTACKS LATE MAY 15 ON THE AL-SUDANIYA COMPOUND, WHICH HOUSES THE GENERAL INTELLIGENCE (MUKHABARAT) HEADQUARTERS. UNRWA OFFICES AND THE NSF SARAYA HEADQUARTERS ALSO CAME UNDER ATTACK ON MAY 15-16. (NOTE: UNRWA OPERATIONS CHIEF JOHN GING AND UNSCO SPOKESMAN CHRIS GUNNESS CONFIRMED THAT UNRWA HAS CEASED OPERATIONS IN GAZA CITY AND ONLY A FEW GUARDS WERE AT THE COMPOUND. NO UNRWA STAFF HAVE BEEN HARMED IN RECENT CLASHES. END NOTE). WHILE BOTH COMPOUNDS TOOK HEAVY FIRE, THERE DID NOT SEEM TO BE A CONCERTED EFFORT TO CAPTURE THE NSF HEADQUARTERS.

ABBAS PLANS GAZA TRIP
AS STREET BATTLES CONTINUE

15. (SBU) DESPITE A NEW, EGYPTIAN-BROKERED CEASEFIRE THAT WAS SCHEDULED TO GO INTO EFFECT AT 2400 LOCAL ON MAY 15 AND A PHONE CALL BETWEEN DAMASCUS-BASED HAMAS LEADER KHALID MISHA'AL AND PRESIDENT ABBAS, INTENSE FIREFIGHTS CONTINUE AS OF 1500 LOCAL ON MAY 16 IN GAZA CITY AND NORTHERN GAZA. (NOTE: ACCORDING TO UN OFFICIALS IN GAZA, FIGHTING HAS LARGELY BEEN LIMITED TO GAZA CITY AND THE NORTH, WITH LITTLE DISRUPTION IN OTHER GAZA CITIES. END NOTE). ACCORDING TO PUBLIC COMMENTS BY PLO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE SECRETARY-GENERAL YASSER ABD RABBO, PRESIDENT ABBAS HAS DELAYED HIS PLANNED TRIP TO JORDAN AND WILL TRAVEL INSTEAD TO GAZA. SEVERAL FATAH LEADERS, INCLUDING DEPUTY PM AZZAM AL-AHMAD, HAVE PUBLICLY CALLED ON ABBAS TO DECLARE A STATE OF EMERGENCY. FATAH SECURITY COMMANDERS, KEY FACILITIES

16. (SBU) THE HAMAS MILITARY WING AND THE "EXECUTIVE FORCE" ARE PARTICIPATING IN THESE ATTACKS. FATAH MILITIAS, THE NSF AND PSO ARE OPPOSING THEM, WITH SOME PG AND MUKHABARAT INVOLVEMENT. CURRENT CLASHES ARE FOCUSING ON PASF-HAMAS MILITARY-WING GUNBATTLES IN THE NUR TOWER AREA (LOCATION OF THE HAMAS-RUN AL-AQSA TV AND FORMER FM MAHMUD AL-ZAHAR'S OFFICES), WHERE ONE PSO MEMBER WAS KILLED BY HAMAS SNIPER FIRE AND A BYSTANDER WAS KILLED IN A HAMAS-PASF SHOOTOUT. HAMAS FIGHTERS ALSO ATTACKED THE GAZA PRESIDENTIAL COMPOUND WITH THREE MORTARS AND SMALL ARMS FIRE AT 1430 LOCAL.

ISRAELI INVOLVEMENT,
HAMAS ROCKET ATTACKS

17. (SBU) AN ISRAELI AIR ATTACK STRUCK A MAJOR EXECUTIVE FORCE POSITION IN RAFAH AT 1400 ON MAY 16, ACCORDING TO PALESTINIAN SECURITY CONTACTS, KILLING 4 "EXECUTIVE FORCE" MEMBERS AND INJURING 12 OTHERS, ACCORDING TO PALESTINIAN SECURITY SOURCES.

18. (SBU) HAMAS MILITARY-WING CREWS CLAIMED 36 QASSAM ROCKET LAUNCHES AGAINST ISRAEL ON MAY 15-16. 17 ROCKETS STRUCK SDEROT, INJURING 7 ISRAELIS (ONE SERIOUSLY) AND DAMAGING SEVERAL HOUSES AND COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS.

COMMENT: HOW THIS ROUND OF
FATAH-HAMAS CLASHES IS DIFFERENT

19. (C) LEVELS OF VIOLENCE IN GAZA SINCE MAY 13 EQUAL OR EXCEED THOSE IN EARLY JANUARY, BEFORE THE NATIONAL UNITY GOVERNMENT (NUG) WAS FORMED, BUT SEVERAL KEY DIFFERENCES MAKE CURRENT FIGHTING MORE TROUBLING:

-- NSA MUHAMMAD DAHLAN REMAINS IN EGYPT RECOVERING FROM KNEE SURGERY, LEAVING LEADERSHIP OF FATAH-ALIGNED FORCES TO RASHID ABU SHBAK, A STRONG BUT LESS-CHARISMATIC FIGURE;

-- HAMAS SEEMS TO HAVE HELD THE INITIATIVE IN NEARLY ALL SIGNIFICANT ENCOUNTERS, WITH PASF UNDER PRESIDENT ABBAS' AUTHORITY AND FATAH MILITIAS MAINTAINING A GENERAL DEFENSIVE

POSTURE IN/AROUND LARGE COMPOUNDS;

-- THE HAMAS MILITARY-WING (IZZ AL-DIN AL-QASSAM BRIGADES), NOT THE "EXECUTIVE FORCE," HAS DONE MOST OF THE FIGHTING, MAKING THIS A DIRECT FATAH-HAMAS CONFRONTATION RATHER THAN A FIGHT BETWEEN SECURITY FORCES WITH DIFFERING ALLEGIANCES;

-- HAMAS RHETORIC HAS BEEN MORE VIRULENT IN RECENT DAYS, WITH HAMAS MILITARY-WING WEBSITE POSTINGS AND MEDIA STATEMENTS LABELING PG MEMBERS AS TRAITORS AND ACCUSING THEM OF ISRAELI/U.S. COLLUSION AND ATTACKS ON MOSQUES, AND HONORING HAMAS MILITANTS KILLED IN INTERNAL FIGHTING AS MARTYRS, A TITLE USUALLY USED FOR THOSE KILLED IN ATTACKS AGAINST ISRAEL;

-- THERE IS NO INTERNAL PALESTINIAN POLITICAL DIALOGUE UNDERWAY THAT COULD ACT AS A BRAKE ON THE CYCLE OF ATTACKS AND RETALIATION;

--RIFTS WITHIN HAMAS COMPLICATE THE SITUATION. HAMAS FORCES APPEAR TO BE UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE MILITARY WING AND HARD-LINE POLITICAL ELEMENTS.

WALLES